NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0012 JANUARY 22, 1976
WILLIAM WADE/LONDON

SUPERSONIC DIPLOMACY

ANNCR:

THE BEGINNING OF COMMERCIAL SUPERSONIC PASSENGER SERVICE BY FRENCH AND BRITISH AIRLINES RAISES ISSUES THAT ARE GOING TO KEEP DIPLOMATS BUSY FOR MONTHS AHEAD. FROM LONDON VOA CORRESPONDENT WILLIAM WADE EXPLAINS:

VOICE:

AIR FRANCE AND BRITISH AIRWAYS LAUNCHED THEIR FIRST FLIGHTS WITH MUCH AIRLINE FANFARE -- AND GREAT EMPHASIS THAT THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING. "DAY ONE OF MACH TWO," SAID THE FRENCH ADVERTISEMENT. AIR FRANCE WANTS TO FLY TWICE THE SPEED OF SOUND TO SEVERAL LATIN AMERICAN CITIES, AFTER ITS INITIAL SERVICE TO RIO DE JANIERO. BRITISH AIRWAYS SEES ITS TWICE WEEKLY SERVICE TO BAHRAIN BEING EXTENDED ACROSS INDIA TO AUSTRALIA. BOTH AIRLINES WANT TO FLY THEIR SLENDER, DELTA WING CONCORDE ACROSS THE NORTH ATLANTIC TO WASHINGTON AND, ABOVE ALL, TO NEW YORK. IT'S THE BUSY NORTH ATLANTIC ROUTE, TRAVELLED BY MILLIONS OF PASSENGERS YEARLY, THAT OFFERS THE ONLY REALISTIC CHANCE OF AN ECONOMIC RETURN ON CONCORDE'S COSTS OF MORE THAN TWO THOUSAND MILLION DOLLARS.

NOISE IS ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS. AIR POLLUTION IS ANOTHER. CONCORDE IS NOISER THAN MODERN PASSENGER JETS, AND IT SPREADS THE NOISE FARTHER ON BOTH TAKE-OFF AND LANDING. THE PLANE'S SUPPORTERS LAMENT THE FACT THAT ITS ROLLS ROYCE ENGINES WERE DESIGNED IN THE EARLY NINETEEN SIXTIES WHEN THERE WAS GREATER PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF AIRPORT NOISE. PEOPLE USED TO GO TO AIRSHOWS JUST TO HEAR THE NOISE. AND, THE SUPPORTERS SAY, CONCORDE IS NOT NOISIER THAN JETS STILL IN SERVICE

BUT THE MID-SIXTIES SAW THE RISE OF THE MOVEMENT TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT, RESULTING IN MORE STRINGENT ANTI-NOISE AND ANTI-POLLUTION STANDARDS NOT ONLY IN THE UNITED STATES BUT HERE IN EUROPE. NOW, THE BIGGEST QUESTION MARK FOR SUPERSONIC TRAVEL IS A RULING, PROMISED BY FEBRUARY FOURTH, FROM U.S. TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY WILLIAM COLEMAN ABOUT LETTING CONCORDE LAND AT NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON. EVEN IF HE SAYS YES, HOWEVER, THE ANTI-NOISE ENVIRONMENTALISTS ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE THE CASE TO COURT.

WHILE U.S. LANDING RIGHTS ARE PENDING, ANGLO-FRENCH DIPLOMATS ARE TRYING TO SHIFT A LOT OF FENCE SITTERS. THE TWO COUNTRIES WANT TO FLY TO JAPAN, WHICH MEANS GETTING LANDING RIGHTS THERE AND STOP-OVER RIGHTS IN THE SOVIET UNION. THESE MAY BE TRADED FOR RECIPROCAL RIGHTS FOR THE SUPERSONIC SOVIET TU-ONE-FOUR-FOUR WHEN IT IS READY FOR SERVICE OUTSIDE THE U.S.S.R. THE TWO GOVERNMENTS ALSO WANT TO SELL CONCORDES TO IRAN AND CHINA, COUNTRIES WHICH STILL HAVE PURCHASE OPTIONS ON THE PLANE. NOW THAT CONCORDE IS FLYING, ITS BACKERS DREAM THAT ITS SPEED AND TECHNOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENT MAY YET WIN IT WORLD ACCEPTANCE.

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